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Six months -- half a year -- has passed since the Iowa Public Information Board opened its door for business. The end of year statistics show that 251 citizens, government officials, legal counsel and media employees contacted the IPIB for information about Chapters 21 and 22 --- Open Meetings and Public Records. At this pace, the IPIB is on track to log over 500 cases this fiscal year. In December 2013 alone, the five-month-old IPIB website (www.ipib.iowa.gov) registered 2308 page views – with 400 unique viewers visiting an average of 4.56 pages on the site. A breakdown of the visitors in December shows that over 70 percent were first-time viewers.

Questions and complaints have included issues from simple to complex. Some questions can be resolved within the hour; others can take days or weeks. “How do I make a public records request?” “Who is the custodian?” “How do I provide notice for a public meeting?” – These questions can be answered quickly, easily and with reference to the Iowa Code.

Other questions: “What does 24 hours’ notice actually mean?” “Is this a social gathering or a deliberative meeting?” “Is this advisory group subject to open meetings/public records laws?” require research, legal reasoning and board discussion before an answer is given.

Of the 251 contacts, 139 are classified as informal requests for assistance, primarily from governmental bodies seeking IPIB assistance in obtaining the goal of government transparency. IPIB staff work directly with the contact to avert potentially negative situations. This may require assisting with a policy for record releasing, advising on the legality of closed meetings, suggesting ways to improve an agenda, and even defining what a public record is.

All this is provided by a nine-member volunteer board and a full-time staff of two attorneys and one administrative assistant.

Efforts are underway to expand the training function of the IPIB. In addition to the live instruction and the FAQs on the website, the IPIB plans to include “Public Information 101” web-based training and “Hot Topics” features. Promoting ‘best practices’ as an integral part of training and community outreach is already underway. A legislative agenda is being studied for the 2015 legislative session.

IPIB board members and staff have been pleasantly surprised by the amount of contact from Iowans (and others) who obviously want and need someplace to go with questions, concerns and complaint. It is apparent that our work has just begun. We are excited about the issues and challenges that face the IPIB and ready to go forward with the goal of government transparency from the local parks board to the Capitol.

Margaret E. Johnson
Deputy Director

Board Members

Robert Andeweg • Anthony Gaughan • Jo Martin • Andrew McKean • Gary Mohr • William Monroe
• Kathleen Richardson • Suzan Stewart • Peggy Weitl

Case Stats as of 1-23-2014

Formal Complaints	-	45
Formal Opinions	-	3
Declaratory Orders	-	2
Informal Complaints	-	57
Informal Requests	-	160
Misc. Others	-	15
TOTAL	-	282